

## The DisAbility Project

Since 1996, That Uppity Theatre Company has focused on developing projects that bring together amateur performers with professional artists to create innovative material based on lived experience. Co-founded by Joan Lipkin and Fran Cohen, The DisAbility Project represents one of the most comprehensive creative endeavors in the Midwest to address issues of disability and creativity. Few organizations in the country have presented such a broad-based collaboration between disabled and able-bodied actors, artists, designers, activists, and other members of the community.

We rehearse most Saturday mornings in space donated by the Washington University School of Medicine's Program in Occupational Therapy in the Central West End of the city of St. Louis. Most rehearsals are open to the public. Our season runs September through June, with performances throughout Missouri and Illinois.

People with disabilities are typically absent from representation and participation in our cultural landscape. According to the 2000 Missouri Census, an estimated 17% of the population in the state experiences some form of disability, whether it is sensory, cognitive, or mobility related. With over 55 million people with disabilities in the United States, it is the largest and most financially challenged population in the country.

Entering its 10<sup>th</sup> season, The DisAbility Project brings awareness and sensitivity to issues in the disability community through a unique combination of art and advocacy that tours to a variety of audiences. The project has performed for over 30,000 people to date, presenting at educational institutions, conferences, special events, festivals, religious and civic groups, and corporations.

Our group is comprised of people with and without disabilities who are diverse in age, race, ethnicity, class, occupation, education, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, and performance experience.

Some of the challenges facing participants include spinal cord injury, Multiple Sclerosis, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, AIDS, alcoholism, asthma, cancer, Polio, stroke, epilepsy, blindness, brain injury, bipolar disorder, amputation, depression, and cognitive delay.

Ensemble members engage in conversation, writing, sound, movement and theatrical exercises to create educational and entertaining performance pieces on the culture of disability. Many people with disabilities are finding both a sense of community and an outlet for their talents in the project, while our artists without disabilities have had their worldview expanded.

Selected performances include:

### Conferences:

Fair Housing Conference (Equal Housing Opportunity Council)  
Gateway to Diversity Conference (Greater St. Louis Federal Executive Board)  
International Society for Disability Studies Conference  
Missouri State Convention of Student Council Associations

National Benevolent Association, 7th Annual HUD Conference  
Parent-to-Parent Conference  
United Church of Christ Conference

### Churches and Temples:

Central Reform Congregation  
Christ Church Cathedral  
Union Avenue Christian Church  
United Hebrew Congregation

*Public Institutions:*

Big Bear Creek Golf Course  
Bi-State  
Food Outreach  
Magic House  
Missouri History Museum  
Schlafly Public Library  
Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra On-Stage,  
Powell Symphony Hall  
St. Louis Zoo  
United Access

*Schools:*

Affton High School  
Athena Elementary School  
Cathedral School  
Crossroads High School  
Gotsch School  
Hicroft Ridge Elementary School  
Ladue High School

Missouri Fine Arts Academy  
Missouri Scholars Academy  
Nerinx High School  
New City School  
Parkway Central High School  
Rose Acres Elementary School  
Rossman School  
Ursuline Academy  
Visitation Academy  
Whitfield School

*Colleges and Universities:*

Maryville University  
St. Louis Community College at Florissant  
Valley  
St. Louis Community College at Meramec  
St. Louis University  
University of Missouri St. Louis  
Washington University  
Webster University